

June 19, 2001

## COOPERATION WITH THE MEDICAL INSPECTOR

**1. PURPOSE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive specifies the cooperation needed for the Office of the Medical Inspector (OMI) to carry out its investigative functions and inquiries.

**2. BACKGROUND:** The Medical Inspector serves as an objective and independent arm of the Office of the Under Secretary for Health. The Medical Inspector's charges are the monitoring of the quality of medical care provided by VHA, and oversight of the VHA offices which manage quality and performance activities. The Medical Inspector may initiate investigations, or undertake them, on behalf of the Under Secretary for Health, when requested to do so by veterans, VHA employees, the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Inspector General, members of Congress, or other stakeholders. The Medical Inspector is a member of the VHA senior management team and is eager to be fully cooperative with VHA facility and network managers. The Medical Inspector may resolve an issue through the use of inquiry to the parties concerned or through the use of existing data. However, the Medical Inspector may require additional information or conduct site visits to gather information in order to develop the factual analysis needed to resolve an issue.

**3. POLICY:** It is VHA policy that Medical Inspector reviews may involve individual case reviews, program reviews, reviews of systemic issues or other issues determined by the Medical Inspector to be within the scope of the Office of the Medical Inspector. **NOTE:** *This includes care provided by VA facilities or care provided to veterans through contractual arrangements.*

### 4. ACTION

a. All VHA officials, employees, and contractors, that is, field, network, VA Central Office, and those associated with special offices, shall cooperate fully and forthrightly with the Office of the Medical Inspector. Requests for information or follow-up by the Medical Inspector should be viewed as requests by the Under Secretary for Health. **NOTE:** *Should the effort required to respond promptly impinge on a unit's ability to do its routine work in a timely manner, the Medical Inspector, on request, may alter the timing of the response.*

b. Requests for information (whether oral or in writing) from the Medical Inspector, or designee, must be promptly and completely answered. The Medical Inspector's requests are to be considered essential *a priori* and as "need-to-know" exemptions to FOIA, the Privacy

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Act, or Quality Assurance protections and, therefore, shall be honored. If any problems in responding can be anticipated, the Office of the Medical Inspector is to be contacted immediately to review the issues. The Office of the Medical Inspector makes the final determination on the request.

c. When indicated by the information received or other circumstances, the Office of the Medical Inspector may establish a team to investigate the issue. VA facilities are to supply such support and assistance as requested by the Office of the Medical Inspector. **NOTE:** *Should issues arise that might lead to questions or difficulties regarding provision of information to or support for the Office of the Medical Inspector, responsible officials should call the Office of the Medical Inspector directly.*

d. The Office of the Medical Inspector coordinates and collaborates with the parties involved and presents the findings of any inquiry to the Under Secretary for Health.

**5. REFERENCES:** None.

**6. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY:** The Office of the Medical Inspector (10MI) is responsible for reporting on compliance with the contents of this VHA Directive.

**7. RESCISSION:** VHA Directive 96-021 is rescinded. This VHA Directive expires June 30, 2006.

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